



Selling Water to a Whale? Jay-Z's Support for Vouchers in PA



He boasts that he can sell ice in winter and water to a whale.

Now rapper Jay-Z has added his name to the list of [billionaires](#) supporting the movement to divert public funds to private schools. His organization's [stated goal](#) is to assist “the children of the poorest zip codes in Pennsylvania,” where the legislature is considering a voucher proposal. But as NEPC director Kevin Welner pointed out in a recent [USA Today article](#), Jay-Z and his organization are simply incorrect: Vouchers harm students academically; they do not help them.

A [CNN investigation](#) focused on Arizona flagged several additional concerns. Vouchers in that state have diverted [\\$332 million](#) from public to private schools in just the past year. That's about five times more than the state's lawmakers had been told it would cost. The excess is in large part because only about a third of the voucher users came directly from public schools—meaning that most of the students benefitting were not escaping what Jay-Z's company Roc Nation refers to as a “fundamentally flawed and failing system.” Rather, they had previously been homeschooled or enrolled in private schools; their families had not previously used public funds to educate their children.

CNN also found that vouchers disproportionately benefitted wealthier communities. Approximately 33 percent of Arizona's voucher recipients live in zip codes with a median household income of \$100,000 or more as compared to 20 percent of Arizona children overall.

“You’re enabling doctors, lawyers, bankers, management consultants who already had their children in private schools to get this subsidy that they were not entitled to before,” [Samuel Abrams](#), the director of NEPC’s International Partnership for the Study of Educational Privatization, told CNN.

About half the funds went to religious schools, according to CNN. “We’re not talking about the school in ‘Dead Poets Society’ here,” NEPC Fellow [Josh Cowen](#) of Michigan State University told CNN. “We’re talking about schools run out of church basements.” [Arizona](#) vouchers fund schools that teach creationism as science and downplay the harms of slavery.

Unlike most public schools, private schools are also free to pick and choose which students they admit, meaning they can—and do—reject LGBTQ+ students and parents, families that do not share their religious views, English learners/emerging bilinguals, and students with disabilities.

“What’s insidious about how the Pennsylvania thing is being marketed is this idea that all you have to do is be eligible for a voucher and you can save your child’s life and leave failing Philadelphia schools,” Cowen [told Education Week](#). “There’s nothing in the legislation that requires them to take you.”

NEPC Resources on Vouchers

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